

Equal Justice Wyoming



Annual Report to the Wyoming Supreme Court

July 2015

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MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

On behalf of the Board of Commissioners and Staff of Equal Justice Wyoming, I am happy to report our program's progress, which is highlighted in our 2015 Annual Report, covering the fiscal year ending June 30, 2015.

As you know, last year we changed our name to Equal Justice Wyoming. Our new name is a statement about who we are and captures the ideal that is central to our vision - "Equal access to justice for the people of Wyoming." U.S. Supreme Court Justice, Lewis Powell, Jr. said equal justice under law "is perhaps the most inspiring ideal of our society." We hope to make that ideal a reality for our state through the expansion of civil legal aid, including legal information, self-help resources, legal education and outreach, and legal representation.

We cannot achieve this goal alone. The foundation of our success has been built working together with stakeholders and partners who share our vision. It is only through this shared commitment from so many dedicated people that we can achieve equal access to justice in the Equality State. We extend our sincere gratitude to everyone who has contributed to our organization's progress and success over the past year.

- Angie Dorsch

Equal justice under law is not merely a caption on the façade of the Supreme Court building, it is perhaps the most inspiring ideal of our society. It is one of the ends for which our entire legal system exists...it is fundamental that justice should be the same, in substance and availability, without regard to economic status.

-Lewis Powell, Jr.
U.S. Supreme Court Justice

THE HISTORY OF EQUAL JUSTICE WYOMING

Equal Justice Wyoming (“Equal Justice”) was first established as the Wyoming Center for Legal Aid. It was created by the Wyoming Supreme Court on April 19, 2011, and is authorized and funded by the Wyoming Civil Legal Services Act, Wyo. Stat. 5-2-121 et. seq. Equal Justice is governed by a Board of Commissioners appointed by the Wyoming Supreme Court.

Equal Justice is Wyoming’s first state-sponsored civil legal aid program and is charged with developing and sustaining a statewide program for improving access to justice and providing civil legal services to low-income individuals in Wyoming. Equal Justice provides a variety of legal resources for the public and helps connect individuals with information and legal services.

Now in its fourth year of operation, Equal Justice continues to create and expand the availability of legal services and resources throughout the state. Working collaboratively with a variety of stakeholders, Equal Justice facilitates, coordinates, and supports a wide network of statewide legal services., from self-help resources to representation from an attorney, in order meet the legal needs of the people of Wyoming.

HIGHLIGHTS

Perhaps the most moving highlight of the past year, and the area of greatest success, is the progress of the statewide *pro bono* program. The I’ll Do One campaign has inspired an increasing number of Wyoming attorneys to donate their time and talent to take on a *pro bono* case. The campaign has increased the number of *pro bono* volunteers by 185% over the past year.

Funding from Equal Justice continues to provide vital support to legal aid providers throughout the state. Equal Justice is the single largest funder of civil legal aid in Wyoming.

In total, 3,174 low-income individuals received direct legal services of an attorney from Equal Justice and Equal Justice funded programs. Although this is a slight decline from the previous year, we continue our progress to ensure access to justice is available in some form for every person in Wyoming. Access to justice is more than just an attorney for the low-income, it includes a wide range of resources and assistance that is available to all people.

In addition to those individuals who received legal assistance from an attorney, many more benefited from other Equal Justice projects and resources. Hundreds of people visit Equal Justice’s website everyday for legal information and self-help resources. In addition, Equal Justice and our grantees provided legal information, resources, education, and self-help assistance to countless individuals. This broad range of services helps ensure access to justice for all in our state.



A total of 3,174 qualifying individuals received direct legal assistance from an attorney through Equal Justice and Equal Justice funded programs over the past year.

Self-Help & Technology Projects

LEGAL RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Equal Justice first launched our legal information and self-help website,

www.legalhelp.wy.gov, in November of 2012.

Last year we updated the website to make it mobile enabled. Making the site mobile friendly is important in order to make the site accessible with a wide range of mobile devices. Studies show that the low-income population relies heavily on mobile devices as their sole source of internet access. Making the site mobile friendly ensures more people will have access to legal information.

New content continues to be added to the site, with contributions from all Equal Justice staff. Additional forms have been added to the forms library, which contains downloadable, fillable forms for the types of cases that frequently affect low-income clients. Each set of forms has detailed instructions to assist the user. The forms have proved popular with litigants, clerks and judges.

A presentation about the self-help website and resources was also offered to the Circuit Court Clerks Association at their annual meeting.

www.legalhelp.wy.gov

⇒ Legal information, resources, and self-help forms with detailed instructions

www.probono.wy.gov

⇒ Resources for volunteer attorneys

www.equaljustice.wy.gov

⇒ Information about Equal Justice and our programs



Equal Justice's self-help website provides a wealth of valuable information and resources to the public.

PORTAL PROVIDES ON-DEMAND RESOURCES AND SUPPORT FOR PRO BONO ATTORNEYS

Equal Justice maintains a **Pro Bono Portal** to help support volunteer attorneys in their work. The portal contains downloadable resources, resource links, and sample pleadings. The portal currently contains six topic areas including: family law, housing, consumer law, public benefits, trusts & estates, and expungements. Additional resources on the website include a CLE archive, litigation toolkit, and a limited scope toolkit. Equal Justice continually adds resources to the portal.

MENTORS FOR VOLUNTEERS

Over the past year, Equal Justice worked to recruit a pool of mentor attorneys willing to provide mentorship and support to *pro bono* lawyers. Mentor attorneys are important, especially for new attorneys or attorneys accepting a *pro bono* case outside their regular area of practice. Equal Justice provides contact information for the mentor attorneys in the *pro bono* program orientation packet.

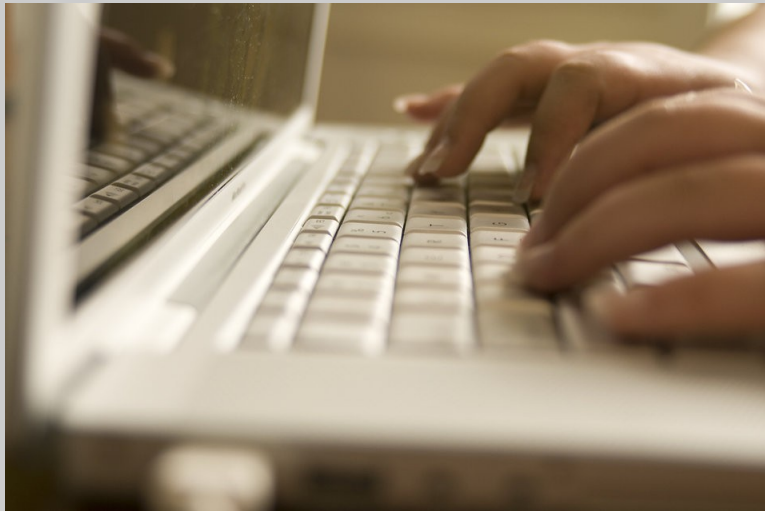
WYOMING INTERACTIVE SELF-HELP CENTER

Equal Justice continues work to automate a series of interactive *pro se* form interviews based on the Wyoming Supreme Court Family Law *Pro Se* packets. This is a time intensive project on which Equal Justice will continue to work until all of the Supreme Court's *pro se* packets are automated. Equal Justice, in collaboration with the Wyoming Supreme Court and Court Technology department, launched the portal in June 2014 with the availability of the first packet in

the series, the Divorce Without Children packet.

In the past year, 401 new users have created an account to access the portal, 211 users used an automated interview, and 93 users printed a completed set of forms generated from the automated interview.

Litigants can access the interactive interviews at the **Wyoming Interactive Self-Help Center**, available at <https://wise.courts.state.wy.us>. Auto-



Automated forms simplify legal documents by walking the self-represented litigant through a guided interview, very similar to how TurboTax® works. The automation process uses a document assembly software which walks the litigant user through a series of question and answer interviews while collecting their essential information. At the end of the interview, the litigant is presented with complete and accurate family law forms, ready for printing and filing. The portal enables litigants to create an account, save their information and return later to complete the forms, at their convenience.

Wyoming Interactive Self-Help Center

- ⇒ <https://wise.courts.state.wy.us>
- ⇒ 401 users created an account
- ⇒ 211 users used an automated interview
- ⇒ 93 users completed and printed forms created from the automated interview

ITT CHICAGO—KENT COLLEGE OF LAW CHOOSES EQUAL JUSTICE WYOMING PROJECT FOR JUSTICE THROUGH TECHNOLOGY PRACTICUM

The ITT Chicago—Kent College of law selected Equal Justice Wyoming's Guardianship of a Minor Child *pro se* forms for a project for the Justice Through Technology Practicum at the law school. A Kent law student spent the academic year working with Equal Justice to automate the guardianship *pro se* packet. The automated forms are currently in the testing phase. With a growing number of non-parent caregivers, Equal Justice's minor guardianship forms are already widely used. Automating the packet will help simplify the documents for users.

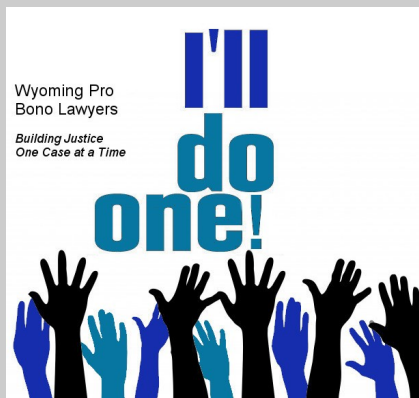
PRO BONO PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES

Equal Justice's formal *pro bono* program continues to build momentum. While recruitment of more volunteer attorneys is still needed, we are pleased to see increased involvement from Wyoming's bar. Equal Justice continues to partner with the Wyoming State Bar on the "I'll Do One" *pro bono* campaign. This year 50 new lawyers formally enrolled in the campaign, bringing the total number of "I'll Do One" lawyers to 77—an **increase of 185%** over the past year. In addition to the volunteer lawyers officially enrolled in the "I'll Do One" campaign, this year we had 40 attorneys who have not officially signed up for the volunteer attorney program accept a *pro bono* case or volunteer at a legal advice clinic.

Pro Bono by the Numbers

- ⇒ **231 applications for legal services**
- ⇒ **200 clients received legal help from a *pro bono* attorney**
- ⇒ **122 clients received full representation from a *pro bono* attorney**
- ⇒ **63 attorneys accepted a *pro bono* case for full representation**
- ⇒ **38 attorneys volunteered at legal advice clinics**
- ⇒ **185% increase in I'll Do One volunteers**

Recruitment efforts have been ongoing throughout the year. Equal Justice continues to host CLE webinars and live instruction CLEs in order to recruit and provide training for *pro bono* attorneys throughout the state. Equal Justice hosted in person CLEs in Sheridan and Teton Counties as well as a statewide webinar in conjunction with the Young Lawyer Section of the Wyoming State Bar. In addition, Equal Justice staff and volunteer attorneys continue to present as a part of the Pathways to Professionalism CLE, a mandatory CLE for all newly licensed attorneys in Wyoming. Equal Justice utilizes these outreach events to inspire new, and established, attorneys to build a culture of *pro bono* into their practice. The Access to Justice Commission ("ATJ"), has helped to support this effort through recruitment events. Equal Justice held recruitment drives at both the Wyoming State Bar and Wyoming Trial Lawyers annual conferences.

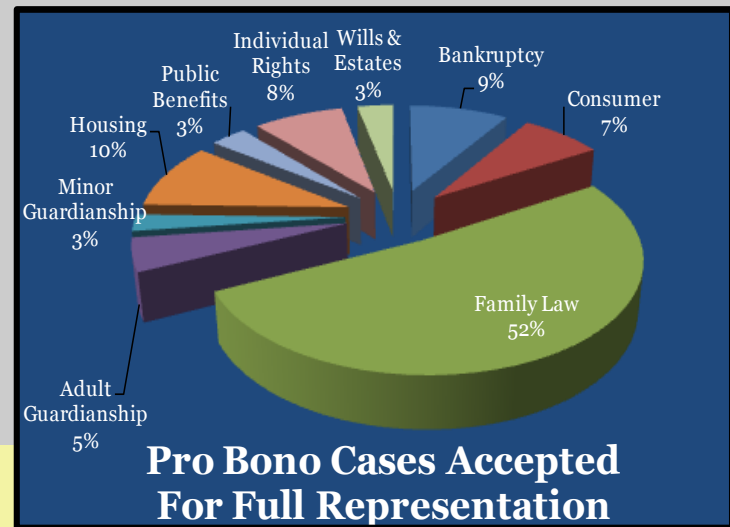
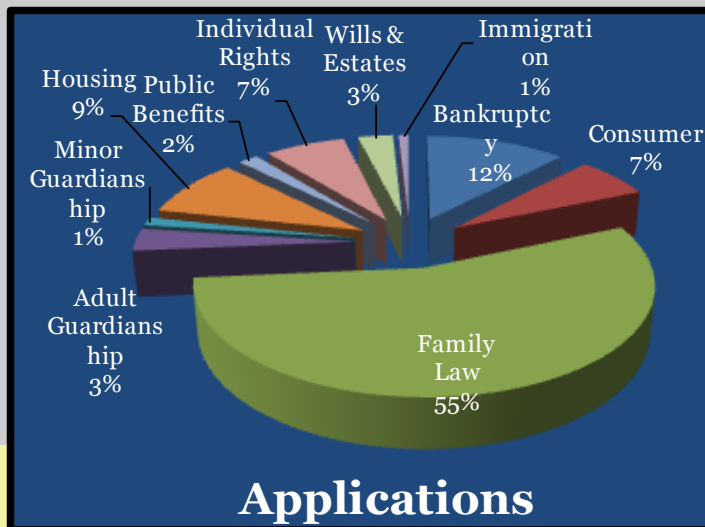


PRO BONO CASE STATISTICS

During the 2015 fiscal year, **200 clients** received some form of legal assistance from a **pro bono attorney** through Equal Justice's *pro bono* programs. Of those clients, **118 client's cases were accepted for full-representation by a volunteer attorney and an additional 82 received free legal advice or brief services** at one of Equal Justice's free monthly legal clinics.

Equal Justice received 231 applications for legal services. More than half of the applicants sought assistance with a family law matter. Twelve percent of the applications concerned bankruptcy relief and nine percent dealt with housing issues. **Equal Justice was able to place 52% of family law applicants, 39% of bankruptcy cases, and 57% of the housing matters with a pro bono attorney.** This is an improved case acceptance rate in all three areas compared to the 2014 fiscal year.

Equal Justice also recruited **three volunteer attorneys** to assist the Laramie County Community Partnership ("LCCP") with the LCCP's attempt to build a **homeless youth residence**. LCCP's Healthy Youth Action Team is a volunteer group that identifies gaps in social services and works to fill those needs. The Laramie County School District #1 has identified 39 homeless youth attending school in the district. The youth home would be available to provide safe and stable housing for older homeless youth who are working to complete high school. Equal Justice volunteer lawyers are advising LCCP throughout the process. It is an exciting project because of the potential impact these types of projects can have on our communities.



TWO EQUAL JUSTICE VOLUNTEER ATTORNEYS RECEIVE PRO BONO AWARDS FROM THE WYOMING STATE BAR

Amanda Roberts, of Lonabaugh and Riggs, LLP, and Paul Hunter, a solo attorney, both received 2014 Pro Bono Awards from the Wyoming State Bar at the Annual Meeting in September 2014. Both Roberts and Hunter have accepted multiple cases through Equal Justice. Roberts has taken on family law and housing cases while Hunter has assisted many individuals with bankruptcy relief. Both Roberts and Hunter have proven dedicated to ensuring access to justice in their communities and around the state and recognition of their work is well-deserved.

WYOMING CELEBRATES NATIONAL PRO BONO WEEK

October 19-25, 2014, Equal Justice again joined with the Wyoming State Bar, legal aid programs and local bar associations across the state to hold *pro bono* events in recognition of National Celebrate *Pro Bono* Week. This was the second year that Wyoming organized statewide participation in the event. *Pro bono* events were held throughout the state with dozens of attorneys volunteering at these events. Governor Matt Mead again signed a proclamation declaring the week *Pro Bono* Week in Wyoming in recognition of the contribution and impact volunteer attorneys have in their communities. This year *Pro Bono* Week was again a success because of the efforts of attorneys across the state.

CELEBRATE
PRO BONO

LEGAL ADVICE CLINICS

Equal Justice continues to sponsor monthly walk-in legal clinics in Cheyenne and helps the law school and Albany County Bar hold clinics in Laramie. A total of 82 qualifying clients were served, and 38 attorneys volunteered their time at these clinics. The clinics continue to be a valuable referral resource for social service providers and court clerks. Equal Justice will continue to work to increase awareness of the clinics and the number of clients served.

⇒ **38 Attorneys volunteered at clinics**

⇒ **82 Clients received assistance at clinics**

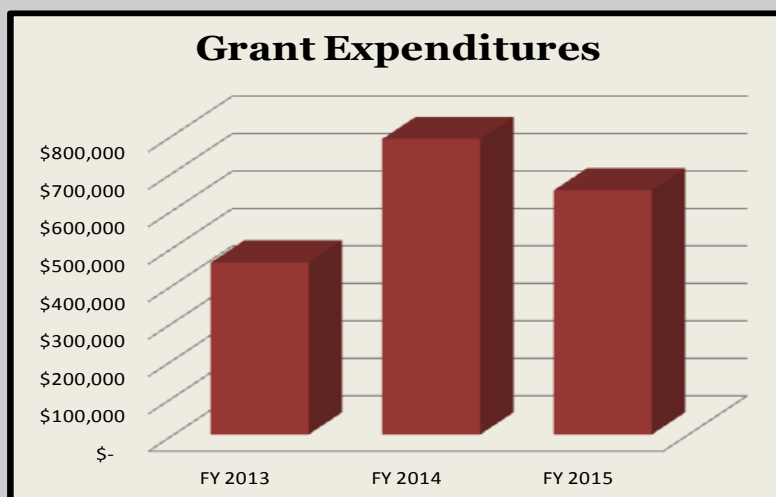
FREE TRAINING AND CLE FOR PRO BONO ATTORNEYS

To support *pro bono* attorneys across the state, Equal Justice offers regular CLEs statewide, via webinar, on topics that are often encountered by low-income clients. The goal is to encourage attorneys to take on a *pro bono* case in an area of law they may not typically practice and have a larger pool of attorneys who are able to accept a case in the largest areas of need. Equal Justice sponsored **eight webinars** in 2015 with a **total attendance of 1,232**. The average attendance was 154 attendees, with more than 200 in attendance for some of the webinars. Equal Justice also presented a webinar in collaboration with the Young Lawyers Section of the State Bar. The webinars continue to be a valuable resource for our *pro bono* attorneys and the webinars are all archived on Equal Justice Pro Bono Portal for volunteer attorneys to refer back at any time.

GRANTS AND CASE DATA

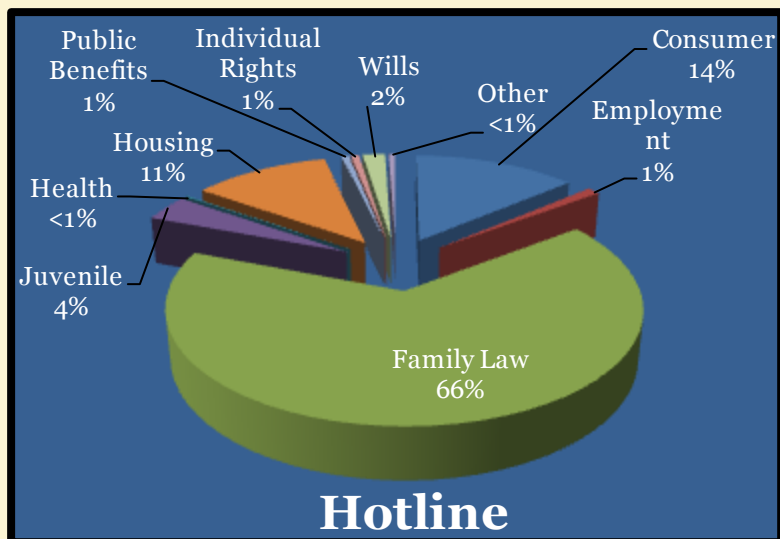
GRANTS SUPPORT STATEWIDE CIVIL LEGAL AID

Equal Justice's mission to establish and maintain a statewide delivery system for civil legal aid is made possible through our partnerships with community organizations and *pro bono* attorneys, and also through the services provided by Equal Justice's grantees. Funding from Equal Justice has greatly expanded the availability of legal services across the state over the past three years. We saw a slight decrease in grant spending over the past year. Although Equal Justice awarded more than \$750,000 in grants in fiscal year 2015, some grantees did not fully spend the funds awarded, which lead to a decrease in grant spending. Grant expenditures totaled **\$652,354** in 2015.



LEGAL ADVICE AND INTAKE HOTLINE

Equal Justice worked in partnership with **Legal Aid of Wyoming, Inc.** to establish a statewide advice and intake hotline which began operation in November 2012. Equal Justice provides the funding for the hotline



2,716 eligible callers received legal assistance from a hotline attorney in FY 2015.

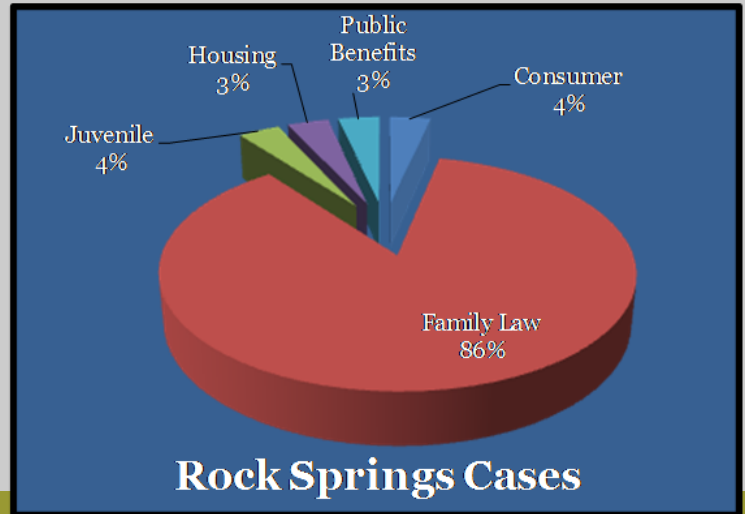
through a grant to Legal Aid of Wyoming, who operates the hotline. The hotline is available Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. It is staffed by two full-time attorneys. It plays an important role in increasing access to legal services in our large, rural state. The hotline allows applicants to call and speak to an attorney and make an application for legal services over the phone, making legal help accessible to any eligible applicant, no matter how far they live from the nearest legal aid provider.

ROCK SPRINGS PROJECT

June 2013 saw the arrival of Rock Springs' first legal aid attorney. A collaboration between organizations has made this expansion of services possible. Equal Justice provides the necessary funds to **Legal Aid of Wyoming** to employ a full-time attorney in Rock Springs. The **Sweetwater County Family Justice Center** has donated the space and overhead. The attorney serves Sweetwater, Lincoln, and Uinta counties.

The past year was a transitional year for the Rock Springs project. The attorney assigned to the grant transitioned to a different role with Legal Aid of Wyoming, and therefore, opened fewer cases than last year, although work continued on a number of cases opened the previous year.

In FY 2015, the Rock Springs office opened only **16 new cases**, however, in the **next year, Rock Springs will be home to two full-time legal aid attorneys**, one working under an Equal Justice grant and a second working under an IRS grant.



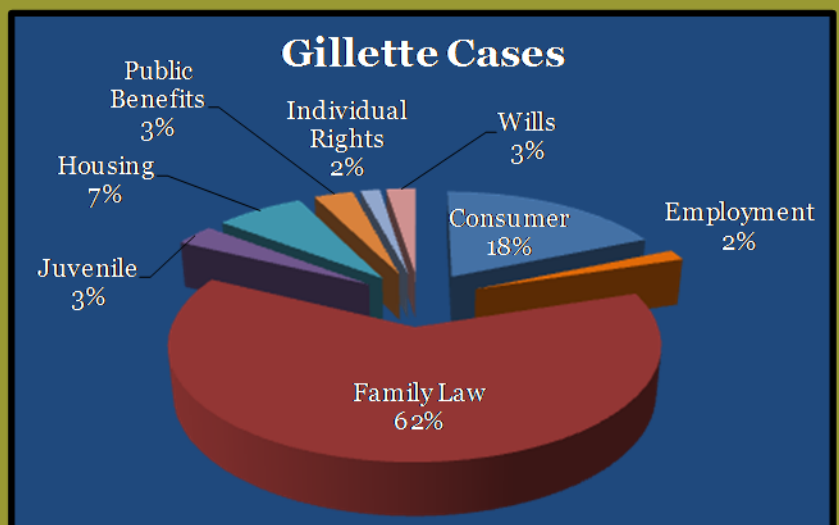
GILLETTE PROJECT

In September 2013, a grant from Equal Justice made it possible to open a legal aid office in Gillette for the first time. Based on the success of the Rock Springs office, Equal Justice used the same model in planning the Gillette office. Equal Justice approached the **Council of Community Services** in Gillette and they agreed to donate the space to house the attorney. Equal Justice provided the grant funds to **Legal Aid of Wyoming** in order to employ a full-time attorney for the position.

The Council of Community Services provides a wide range of services to low-income persons in Gillette and the surrounding area. Adding an attorney helps provide more comprehensive wrap-around services.

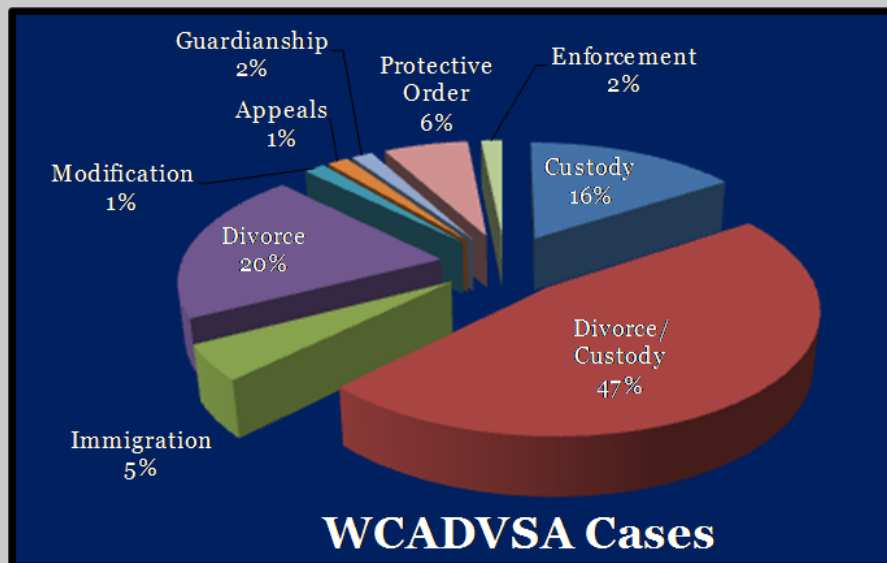
The Gillette office assisted 112 new clients during the 2015 fiscal year. This is a 60% increase in services over the previous year.

Having a full-time staff attorney in Gillette has greatly expanded services to Gillette and the surrounding area. The staff attorney provides services to Campbell, Crook, Weston, Johnson, and Sheridan Counties.



COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

This was the third year Equal Justice provided grant funds to the Coalition. Equal Justice's funds have allowed the Coalition to maintain two full-time attorneys to handle cases throughout Wyoming to assist victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. Equal Justice's grant pays 100 percent of one attorney's position and a portion, roughly 25 percent, of a second full-time attorney position and provides partial funding for support staff, including a paralegal.

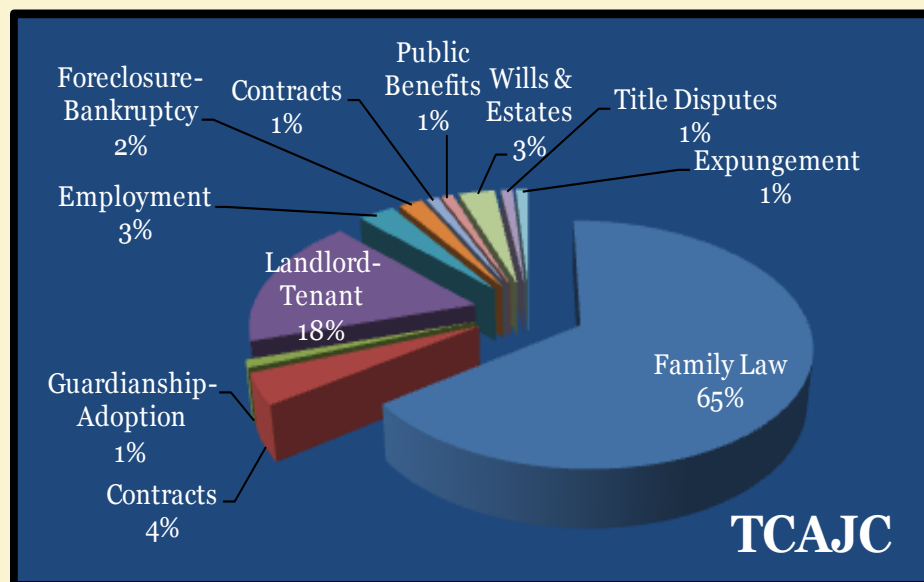


The Coalition provides holistic and comprehensive legal services to clients throughout the state.

The Coalition provided comprehensive legal services to 39 new clients and an additional 6 received limited scope representation. Including cases that remained open from last year, **the Coalition handled a total of 64 cases in 2015.**

TETON COUNTY ACCESS TO JUSTICE CENTER

The Teton County Access to Justice Center was created in 2012 with a grant from Equal Justice. The TCAJC is housed in the Teton County law library and provides legal information and self-help services in addition to providing legal representation through a panel of private contract attorneys to residents of Teton County. Eligible clients may be referred to a private attorney who provides service at no charge to the client. The services are paid at a reduced rate by the TCAJC using the Equal Justice grant funds.

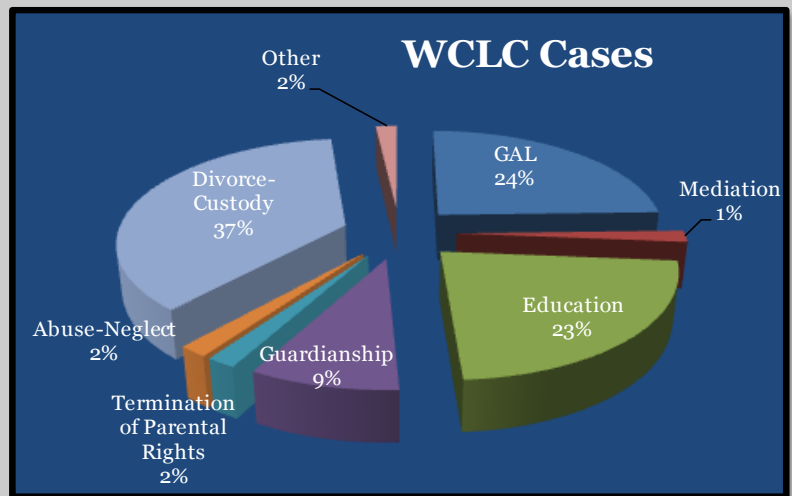


The TCAJC provided an attorney for 53 eligible clients.

In addition to representation by an attorney, TCAJC hosted legal seminars and law clinics assisting an additional 158 individuals.

WYOMING CHILDREN'S LAW CENTER

The Wyoming Children's Law Center received a grant from Equal Justice to provide legal assistance to children and families. The WCLC continues to fill an important need by providing advocacy to ensure children receive special education services to which they are entitled in order to help children with disabilities receive an appropriate education. WCLC's work helps protect children's rights. **WCLC opened 35 new cases this year. Including cases that remained open from last year, WCLC handled a total of 57 cases in 2015.**



EQUAL JUSTICE FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Equal Justice's funding continues to be stable. The special revenue from filing fees has remained stable and continues to generate adequate revenue to cover Equal Justice's authorized budget.

Equal Justice's total expenditures for the 2015 fiscal year decreased. This was due to several factors. The largest factor was a decrease in the amount of grant funds expended by the grantees. Equal Justice awarded \$750,000 in grants for the 2015 fiscal year, however our grantees only spent \$652,354. This accounted for the majority of the change in expenditures over the past year. We expect these expenditures to stabilize over the next year as grantees make budget adjustments and as we add new grantees.

Staff expenses also decreased over the past year. The departure of our Staff Attorney/IT Project Coordinator left a position vacant for almost six months. This significantly reduced this year's staff salary and benefits. This expenditure will also stabilize over the next year.

Equal Justice spent slightly less than budgeted for the year, but as programs and services continue to expand, a growing demand for the limited resources will continue. Equal Justice granted more than \$850,000 in grants for the upcoming grant year and added two new programs as grantees.

EXPENDITURE SUMMARY

Salaries and Benefits	\$306,568
Office Expenses and Travel	\$39,155
Telecommunications	\$3,390

Grants

Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault	\$220,000
Legal Aid of Wyoming	\$308,141
Teton County Access to Justice Center	\$78,516
Wyoming Children's Law Center	\$45,697

Professional Services

Professional Services	\$15,494
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TOTAL*	\$1,016,961
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*Total includes the June 2015 grant expenditures of \$44,676 which were paid in July 2015.



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VISION

Equal access to justice for the people of Wyoming.

MISSION

Serving the legal needs of low-income persons of Wyoming through community engagement, education, information and expansion of legal services throughout the state.

Equal Justice Wyoming
www.equaljustice.wy.gov